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SUBJECT: JEDDAH JOURNAL 18: OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN;
AIRLINES UNABLE TO MEET PASSENGER DEMAND; SAUDIS REACT TO
CONVICTION IN U.S. FOR "NORMAL MUSLIM BEHAVIOR;" PORT OF
JEDDAH REPORTS INCREASED VOLUME; LAWSUIT OVER COUNCIL
ELECTIONS CONTINUES

FOREIGN WOMEN HAVE OPPORTUNITY CLOSED TO SAUDI WOMEN

¶1. The English-language Saudi Gazette reported today on another clash between historic Saudi custom and the demands of a modern economy. Saudi women are complaining that a law in force since 1965 prohibits them from obtaining licenses to operate beauty shops, but recent efforts to promote business allows foreign women to operation these establishments. Consequently, the Saudi women complain, they must take a foreign woman partner if they want to start a beauty shop. One Saudi woman admitted that she had operated a beauty shop for thirteen years, under the guise of a tailor shop, which she is permitted to run. Especially galling to a Saudi woman who had spent three years attempting to persuade Saudi authorities to grant her a permit, is that SAGIA, which was formed to encourage foreign investment, is able to obtain licenses for foreign women to start beauty parlors in only a few days.

SAUDI WOMEN MAY TELECOMMUTE

¶2. The Saudi Labor Ministry has announced that it is studying telecommuting as a means of employing more women. The Ministry source boasted that telecommuting "will create tens of thousands of job opportunities for women." The Ministry of Labor and Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology are surveying the infrastructure necessary to establish women's work centers from which women could carry out their work on the internet. Some women expressed skepticism saying that relatively limited opportunities would be available and continued isolation would prevent women from moving into jobs in the world at large.

CONCERN FOR HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION GROWING IN SAUDI ARABIA

¶3. Residents of an industrial district in Jeddah have complained to the newspapers about the toxic fumes and pollution caused by an asphalt plant located in their neighborhood. The disgruntled residents have been complaining to the municipal government for several years, and the local government, for its part, urged the factory to relocate, but has no legal authority to enforce regulations, despite the factory's clear violation of minimal health and safety standards. Now the resident have gone public citing

declining health among residents and a serious safety hazard created by the transport of flammable products through their neighborhood. COMMENT: This incident underscores the need for environmental regulation in the expanding and increasingly industrialized cities of Saudi Arabia. It also demonstrates that Saudi citizens are becoming bolder in demanding proper service from government. END COMMENT.

SAUDI GROUP ENCOURAGES WOMEN TO PURSUE ART AS A PROFESSION

13. A group called the Young Women's Society of Saudi and Expatriate Women held a two-day art exhibition at the Lina Center on fashionable Tahlia Street in Jeddah. The stated purpose of the group is to encourage young Saudi and expatriate women to pursue art as a profession. Although many colleges offer instruction in art, art is still seen primarily as a means of self-expression, rather than a potential career. This group hopes to change that attitude. Twelve Saudi women exhibited works. Although not well-publicized, and sparsely attended on the first day, the final attendance was sufficiently large to encourage the group to plan more exhibitions in the future. COMMENT: It should be noted that a number of the works exhibited portrayed people, which is contrary to Islamic tradition. END COMMENT.

MORE AIRLINE SEATS NEEDED IN SAUDI ARABIA

14. The end-of-vacation rush of travelers back to the Kingdom has unleashed a flurry of complaints about the lack of passenger capacity. The papers are filled with complaints from weary travelers who were unable to find seats to get them back to Saudi Arabia when they wished. Some passengers

JEDDAH 00000596 002 OF 002

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returning from Asia complained that their confirmed seats were canceled only to discover that they had been sold to other passengers who had bribed airline officials for space. COMMENT: This confirms that the Saudi aviation sector could comfortably support greater airline capacity. END COMMENT.

SAUDI CONVICTED IN US BLAMES ISLAMOPHOBIA

15. The recent conviction of Saudi graduate student Homaïdan al-Turki in Colorado for sexual assault, false imprisonment, and labor law violations continues to attract attention in Saudi Arabia. The student's claim that his arrest and conviction was an example of Western prejudice against Muslims struck a sympathetic chord among Saudis aggrieved by the suspicion they arouse since the 9/11 attacks. At-Turki insisted that the U.S. courts are prosecuting him for normal Saudi practices. The papers gave prominent display to al-Turki's assertion that the woman "was treated as any observant Muslim family would treat his daughter" and quoted his defiant statement to the judge that: "I am not here to apologize, for I cannot apologize for things I did not do and for crimes I did not commit. The state has criminalized these basic Muslim behaviors." (Note: The "normal Muslim practice" leading to his prosecution was reported to be that the maid was forced to sleep in an unfinished basement room in al-Turki's Denver home, and was paid less than \$2.00 per day. The charges of sexual assault he insisted were false, incited by angry FBI officials' pressure on the maid. End note.)

SAUDIS PROTEST CONVICTION

16. A number of Saudi students commented that this case had raised their fears that they also will be targets of biased and arbitrary legal action merely for pursuing Islamic behavior. Several suggested that Saudi students reconsider

attending school in the United States. Saudi officials have also expressed concern about the case. At the opening of a educational exhibition in Mecca, Prince Ahman, Deputy Interior Minister, told reporters that: "We think the sentence is unfair," and assured questioners that the Saudi government was attempting to persuade U.S. authorities to reduce the sentence. Inspired by al-Turki's wife, an SMS (short message system) cell-phone campaign has been calling for a boycott of U.S. products in support of al-Turki.

JEDDAH PORT REPORTS INCREASE IN VOLUME

17. The Jeddah Islamic Port announced an 18.5% increase in volume of cargo handled in 2005 compared to the previous year. The port authority also noted that a recent survey had listed the Port of Jeddah as the 27th largest in the world, in terms of volume, up from 30th place. Jeddah is the second largest port in the Middle East behind Dubai. Currently operating two terminals, an agreement was signed this year for construction of a third terminal which will increase the port's capacity by approximately 50%.

LAWSUIT OVER COUNCIL ELECTIONS CONTINUES

18. The long-running legal contest over last year's local council elections in Jeddah continues. A group of 150 losing candidates have asked the Minister of Municipalities and Rural Affairs to refrain from naming candidates for the vacant non-elected seats on the council, until the court has ruled on their allegations of electoral improprieties.

GOLD LIST ENDORSEMENT IMPROPER

19. The basis for the group's lawsuit is that the "Golden List" slate which had received endorsements from religious leaders benefited because their names were sent anonymously on the internet and through text messaging systems to thousands of potential voters accompanied by a religious endorsement. An attorney for the litigants expressed optimism that they would prevail after four months of hearings.
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